

REASON TEN

By Paul Rawlins

Utah's Fine Arts, Culture and Cuisine Quenching Every Appetite

WHEN MORMON PIONEERS TREKKED TO UTAH 150 years ago, they brought with them a brass band and a penchant for dancing. Within a few years they had established the Deseret Musical and Dramatic Association and built the Social Hall, which some have called "the first Little Theater in America." And as for food—it has come a long way.

The pioneers' strong legacy, combined with the contributions of numerous subsequent "cultural pioneers," has left Utah an oasis, with arts, culture and a growing taste for fine dining that you won't find just anywhere.

For the past 20 years, the "gallery stroll" has been boosting a burgeoning local art scene, which gallery representatives agree is now long on talent. On the third Friday of each month (the first Friday in December) some 25 of Salt Lake's galleries stay open late and invite the public in to "be part of art." The art ranges from the contemporary offerings at the Phillips Gallery to the tousled warmth of the Magpie's Nest in the Avenues to the more urban groove of Art Space, a block of warehouse space refitted as workshops and studios (see <http://ourcommunityconnection.com/slga.html> for more information).

Utah has also become an "exporter" of the arts in the last half century. The Utah Symphony recently returned from a European tour, where one reviewer asked, "What took you so long to get back to us?" The Utah Symphony is one of only 18 "52-week-a-year" symphonies in the country, and Musical Director Keith Lockhart, who divides his conducting duties with the Boston Pops, and renowned guest conductors lead the symphony through a startling array of concerts over the course of a season. October alone had pieces ranging from Dvorak to "Beatlemania," Brahms and Bolero. Fiddler Natalie Mac Master will visit in April. The symphony is courting the younger crowd with its new "Vivace" program, turning nights at the symphony into social events, complete with mingles during intermission and post-performance parties.



The Symphony's home is Abravanel Hall, a venue the Wall Street Journal called "one of the country's most beautiful halls" and *Time* once cited as edging out Carnegie Hall. Since the 2002 Winter Olympics, the lobby has housed a spectacular 27-foot Chihuly glass exhibit. In the summer months, the Symphony takes the music to the people with outdoor performances in cool mountain settings such as Sundance and Deer Valley.

The Symphony also accompanies the Utah Opera (which one wag recently called "the Met of the West"). The Opera's 2006 season will open with "Romeo and Juliet" and include "La Rondine" and the "Magic Flute." Anne Ewers, CEO of the Utah Symphony and Opera, sees the opera as a tantalizing mix of the musical and the visually lush for a culture used to having their eyes wowed. The Utah Opera enjoyed a 15 percent increase in ticket sales last year with the Utah Festival Opera appearing for five weeks each summer in Logan; the Utah Lyric Opera Ensemble; and the Utah Light Opera

Company, which was formed just this year to offer a stage for local talent and "vocally demanding musical theater," the opera scene in other areas continues to grow.

"We are fortunate to have a community that loves the performing arts," Ewers says. Those feelings are echoed by Joan Woodbury, one of the founders of the acclaimed Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. "We're part of an incredible arts legacy," she says. "Being in Utah has enabled us to stay alive this long," which, for Ririe-Woodbury means going on 42 years and performing to acclaim on four continents. This season will include five world premiers, a local blues band, and a show, Mama Eddy's Right-On Boardinghouse, which both parents and children should love.

With its world-class reputation, Utah's Repertory Dance Theatre has become a combination national treasure trove and shrine to contemporary modern dance. Its season includes a retrospective, "Time Capsule: A Century of Dance" and a set of new works in collaboration with



the Springville Museum of Art called "Postcards from Utah," plus the ever-popular "Ring Around the Rose" events for children on Saturday mornings. The dance theatre's home, Salt Lake's new Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center, is another testament to Utah's love of the arts. Its three public theaters will host some 400 events this year, and space is already being booked into 2007.

Another unique arts venue in downtown Salt Lake is the Cathedral of the Madeleine, which hosts the Eccles Organ Festival during the fall, the Madeleine Festival of the Arts and Humanities for seven weeks during the spring, and the Cathedral Concert Series, which runs from November to May. The Cathedral is also home and often stage to the students at the Cathedral Choir School, the only Catholic cathedral choir school in the United States. (If you've got connections, you may be able to land a ticket for the Madeleine's Christmas Carol Service—though you may have to settle for standing.)

One of Utah's longest-standing

tributes to the arts is the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The choir's roots can be said to go back to 1847, when the pioneers assembled their first choir 29 days after arriving in Salt Lake Valley. Since then the choir has grown in popularity and prestige, singing for 10 presidents of the United States, winning an Emmy and a Grammy, achieving gold and platinum status on numerous albums and touring the world multiple times. One of the best ways to enjoy music in Utah is to attend one of the choir's public rehearsals, which are held Thursday nights, or the choir's Sunday morning broadcast of their renowned television and radio program "Music and the Spoken Word."

If your tastes run a bit more contemporary, catch Jazz at the Sheraton on a Monday night, which will bring Chick Corea, Bill Mays, The Yellowjackets, Stacey Kent and others to downtown Salt Lake City for evenings that range from smoking to sultry.

You'll also find a plethora of "concerts in the park" ("concerts by the creek," "twilight concerts") and the

"brown bag" lunch-time series in the summers; and university, college and local symphonies, orchestras, bands, ensembles and choirs pitching in to feed Utah's toe-tapping appetite for all things musical.

ALL OF UTAH IS A STAGE

You can't catch a melodrama at the Social Hall anymore, but you could opt for "Humble Boy" by Pioneer Theatre Company, Utah's resident professional theater. The company's season offers shows ranging from Mary Zimmerman's "Metamorphoses" to the crowd favorite "Beauty and the Beast." If you like your stagecraft a little more edgy, check out something at the Salt Lake Acting Company, which, SLAC's Valerie Kittle says, is featuring "the best collection of new writers we've had in one season." SLAC's relationships with playwrights across the country set the company apart, according to Kittle, giving it a "better feel for the pulse" of top contemporary writing.

For a taste of Broadway, you'll find national touring companies



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making the rounds at Salt Lake's historic Capitol Theater, which traces its history back to vaudeville. Plan B Theater and the Babcock in Salt Lake, Egyptian Theatre in Park City, the popular Hale Theaters and other local companies, productions, and playhouses offer no shortage of community productions up and down the state.

January in Utah, of course, means Sundance. Or Slamdance. Or SlamDunk, Nodance, Disidance, or any one of the festival's lesser-known spin-offs. January is film, pretty much all month, as visitors trekking to Park City to watch the stars come up.

But "Sundance" isn't the only dance in town during the winter. The Capitol Theatre is also home to Utah's much-lauded Ballet West. The upcoming season features a mix of the new and the traditional—including popular and Thalia Prize-winning "Swan Lake" and the 50th anniversary presentation of "The Nutcracker." The first ballet department in an American university was established at the University of Utah, and in that tradition, Ballet West continues with the Ballet West Academy, which offers instruction for students ages 8 to 18.

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THE TASTE OF TOWN

Utah adopted the sego lily as the state flower after early pioneers depended on its edible bulbs to see them through hungry early winters. Now, settlers face the more pleasant—though still difficult—choice of what to eat and where. For downtown chic, it's tough to beat the Metropolitan or the New Yorker club. If you're feeling a little more adventuresome,

you might try Bambara at the "pet-friendly" Hotel Monaco. Reviews say cooking at Bambara is "synonymous with excitement," with dishes such as sea bass with chipotle sauce. You'll find sumptuous Italian at Cucina Toscana or Fresco, Continental and canyon ambiance at Log Haven, or tasty tapas at a high-backed booth in a former bank transformed into the chic Martine (frog legs in red pepper sauce anyone?).

Much of Utah is desert, but you wouldn't know it from the seafood. The Market Street restaurants are local favorites (the clam chowder has become iconic). You can find great sushi in many of the state's cities.

The state's not dry, either. Brew pubs such as Squatters, Red Rock (for tea-totalers, try a house cream soda and a trout sandwich if it's on the ever-rotating menu), and Moab Brewery feature "home" brews such as "St. Provo Girl" or "Dead Horse Ale," as well as tasty pub fare.

Outside of downtown Salt Lake, but certainly not off the beaten path, is Tuscany, where you'll feel right at home—home being a warm Tuscan villa surrounded by trees that Zagat rates as "Extraordinary." Here, you'll find Italian food like Mama used to make—if Mama marinated double-cut pork chops in a maple sugar and molasses brine for two days to create what can rightly be called a confection al carne, or wrapped halibut in Napa cabbage and served it in a cider-fennel broth. The pasta is homemade, and the wine list is one of the most outstanding in the world, according to *Wine Spectator*. Top off your meal with a generous slab of the famous 7'4" chocolate cake (a nod to owner and former basketball star Mark Eaton).

Park City is a Utah in miniature with its own galleries, theater and some of the best cuisine in the state. Check out one of Bill White's trio of hot spots: Grappa, Chimayo, or for a real treat, Wahso (think 1930s Shanghai). Or maybe enjoy a bowl of butternut squash soup garnished with curried apples while you watch the snow come down outside the streetfront window at Bistro 412.

If you're one who likes to shuck the suit and tie and grub with the locals, head west to Salt Lake's Red



Iguana, home of "killer Mexican food." There's only one word you need to know about the Ig: mole. Or grab some sushi at the funky Ginza: green neon, great fish.

For help with your dining choices, *Salt Lake* magazine's Dining Guide (you can find it online at www.saltlakemagazine.com) reviews 260 restaurants throughout the state, complete with hours, address and phone, pricing and fare favorites.

Similarly exceptional dining experiences can be found in St. George, Springdale, Torrey, Boulder, Marysville and other nooks and crannies throughout the state.

No matter what your preferences are, you can find the perfect dining environment to complement your choice of Utah's many art and culture experiences. Whether you're in the mood for an outdoor performance in St. George topped off with a stop at Moab Brewery or an evening of the Utah Symphony followed by fine Italian cuisine in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah's art, culture and dining options are simply extraordinary.

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